

VZCZCXRO6135  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHML #4802/01 3260926  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 220926Z NOV 06  
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4044  
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE  
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004802

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [MY](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: ADVANCING THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT PEACE PROCESS  
WITH THE MILF

REF: MANILA 4656

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. In a wide-ranging 90 minute meeting with nine senior members of the MILF Central Committee at their headquarters, DCM described USG comprehensive support for the Mindanao peace process and commitment to assist former combatants in the event of a peace agreement. Central Committee members unequivocally confirmed MILF's commitment to the peace negotiations, despite "inaccurate rumors" of plans for violence, calling the government "our partner" in the peace process. They welcomed US assistance inside MILF territory, acknowledging the need for security. DCM underscored that all terrorists must be brought to justice, while acknowledging the MILF role in evicting leading terrorists from Central Mindanao in 2005. The MILF said they were studying the government's latest peace proposal, and requested US intercession against the government's insistence on a plebiscite for determining additional territories for an expanded autonomous region, citing a lack confidence in government-run elections. They also sought US help with certain local leaders whom they believe are undermining the peace process. DCM recognized Malaysia's role as facilitator for the peace negotiations, adding that the US wanted to be as supportive as possible. Somewhat surprisingly, the MILF briefed national media on the meeting, accurately describing our mutual support for the peace process. The President's spokesperson welcomed increased USG involvement in the peace process, which he said President Arroyo requested of President Bush during their meeting at APEC. Clearly, our diplomacy in the peace process is gaining traction with both the MILF and the government, complementing our extensive development and defense engagement. End Summary.

12. (C) In a meeting at the Sultan Kudarat headquarters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on November 16, DCM, accompanied by Pol/C and poloff, described to nine senior members of the MILF Central Committee the USG's full support for the overall peace process now underway throughout Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago as well as for the peace talks between the Philippine Government and the MILF under Malaysian mediation. He described the active USG assistance programs to enhance peace and prosperity for all the peoples of Mindanao (for a full description of our strategy to build peace in Mindanao, see reftel) and left a map detailing USAID's robust developmental, health, education, energy, and other programs in the region. He urged that the MILF, as well as the Philippine Government, continue to pursue a peace accord that will lead to even greater zones of peace in which the USG and other foreign donors may help the peoples of Mindanao. He noted disturbing reports of the continued presence in MILF areas of individuals with links to Jemaal

Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf Group, and urged the MILF leadership to ensure that all MILF elements sever ties with terrorists and turn them over to the Philippine authorities.

¶3. (C) Vice Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jaafar welcomed U.S. assistance and reiterated the MILF desire for peace. He described the end result of peace negotiations as a Bangsamoro Judicial Entity that promoted peace, tolerance, and diversity through a competitive democratic process. He welcomed the constructive mission of the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team, and suggested that the IMT might continue to play a helpful role after the signing of a peace accord. He also highlighted the useful work of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), and expressed a desire that its counter-terrorism, counter-crime joint mission might expand to include the Sulu Archipelago. He acknowledged the importance of ensuring that no ASG or JI terrorists operate in MILF territory.

¶4. (C) Jaafar said that the Central Committee continued to study the latest Philippine proposal, but indicated that the real concern now was less about the number of villages and towns to include and more about the Philippine insistence on holding a plebiscite to approve any additional territories of an eventual Bangsamoro Juridical Entity. He said that the main problem was that Philippine elections were not free and fair, and the MILF had doubts about the fairness of such a plebiscite. He urged the USG to urge President Arroyo and the Philippine Government to consider other options, such as a joint Senate/House resolution or an Executive Agreement subject to Senate ratification in order to sidestep the need for a controversial and possibly biased plebiscite. He noted that the MILF usually instructed its personnel to boycott elections because they do not believe they are conducted

MANILA 00004802 002 OF 002

fairly.

¶5. (C) MILF chief peace negotiator Mohagher Iqbal indicated that another key stumbling block on the territorial issue is that the MILF claimed sea as well as land territory, to which the Philippine Government had yet to agree, as well as the island of Palawan in the West Sulu Sea, based on historical claims and the 1976 Tripoli Agreement (which established the basis of the peace agreement with the MNLF).

¶6. (C) Jaafar insisted that the MILF did not anticipate a true breakdown of the peace talks and was not preparing for a return to fighting. DCM asked how the MILF was publicizing its continued support of the peace process and negotiations. Jaafar said that the MILF leadership regularly invited its commanders and other local leaders to MILF headquarters to hear this message and to reiterate the MILF commitment to the peace process.

¶7. (SBU) Joining Jaafar and Iqbal were: Jun Mantawil - Head of the MILF Peace Panel Secretariat; Muhammad Ameen - Chairman of the MILF Secretariat; Omar Pasigan - Head of the Darul Ifta; Khalifa Nando - Chairman of the Majlis Al-Shura; Muhammad Muntasir - Head of the Da'wah Council; Abu Haliya - Member of Finance Committee; and, (FNU) Salic - Member of Trade/Commerce Committee.

¶8. (C) Comment: This third Embassy meeting with MILF leadership clearly generated increased interest and expressions of a desire to work with us. Coupled with the President's frequent comments supporting more active USG involvement, our diplomacy is gaining traction. We are confident that the peace process is alive and well, but note the conspicuous absence from our meeting of MILF Vice Chairman for Military Affairs Mimbantes, who is the Central Committee member actually in contact with local commanders. The government's chief negotiator has offered to brief us on his latest peace proposal, and we will report shortly. We will continue to involve all USG agencies in our efforts to translate our influence into a durable peace that excludes

terrorists from Mindanao.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

KENNEY